SYDENHAM Current

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Walpole Island urges caution for members crossing into U.S.

File Photo

Walpole Island First Nation Chief and Council are urging members to exercise caution when travelling into the United States following an advisory from the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) related to recent U.S. immigration enforcement actions involving Indigenous travellers.

The AFN issued the advisory after confirming that at least one First Nations individual was detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, had their status card seized and was later returned to Canada. AFN National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak said the incident has raised concerns for Indigenous travellers and prompted warnings to ensure proper identification and supporting documentation are carried when crossing the border.

First Nations leaders say the reported detentions, racial profiling and confiscation of identification infringe on inherent Indigenous rights and violate the Jay Treaty, which affirms the right of First Nations people to freely cross the Canada–United States border. In response, multiple First Nations and Indigenous organizations on both sides of the border have issued similar advisories, while Canadian federal departments have said they are monitoring the situation closely and providing support where needed.

The Jay Treaty Border Alliance has also reminded members that individuals born in Canada who qualify as Jay Treaty entrants have lawful status under Section 289 of the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act and are legally authorized to visit, live and work in the United States.

Indigenous leaders warn that increased enforcement measures are straining long-standing cross-border relationships and are calling on governments to uphold treaty obligations and ensure travel is conducted safely, respectfully and without harassment.

Walpole Island First Nation Chief and Council said protecting the rights, safety and well-being of community members remains their highest priority and encouraged members to remain vigilant during what they described as unprecedented times. The community will continue to be updated as developments arise.

Members seeking assistance or clarification can contact the Walpole Island First Nation Membership Department by phone at 519-627-0559. Information related to Indian status and status cards is available through the Government of Canada at ***canada.ca/indian-status***, while Indigenous Services Canada can be reached through its Public Enquiries Contact Centre at 1-800-567-9604 or by email at infopubs@sac-isc.gc.ca. An automated status verification line is also available at 1-877-825-4338.

Chief and Council noted that members who hold U.S. passports are encouraged to carry documentation confirming their First Nations identity when travelling. Members born in the United States are U.S. citizens and are not subject to immigration enforcement jurisdiction, though leaders emphasized the importance of knowing one's rights and carrying proper identification.

Anyone detained while crossing the U.S. border is urged to contact the Native American Rights Fund at 303-447-8760.